JABOTINSKY – THE IRON WALL – 1923

Origininally published in Russian under the title

Zheleznoi Stene in Rassvyet, 4 November 1923

Friday, 26th November, 1937 “The Jewish Herald” (South Africa

The Iron Wall

Colonisation of Palestine

Agreement with Arabs Impossible at present

Zionism Must Go Forward

By Vladimir Jabotinsky

It is an excellent rule to begin an article with the most important point, but this time, I find it necessary to begin with an introduction , and, moreover , with a personal introduction.

I am reputed to be an enemy of the Arabs, who wants to have them ejected from Palestine, and so forth. It is not true.

Emotionally, my attitude to the Arabs is the same as to all other nations – polite indifference. Politically, my attitude is determined by two principles. First of all, I consider it utterly impossible to eject the Arabs from Palestine. There will always be two nations in Palestine – which is good enough for me, provided the Jews become the majority. And secondly, I belong to the group that once drew up the Helsingfors Programme , the programme of national rights for all nationalities living in the same State. In drawing up that programme, we had in mind not only the Jews, but all nations everywhere, and its basis is equality of rights.

I am prepared to take an oath binding ourselves and our descendants that we shall never do anything contrary to the principle of equal rights, and that we shall never try to eject anyone. This seems to me a fairly peaceful credo.

But it is quite another question whether it is always possible to realise a peaceful aim by peaceful means. For the answer to this question does not depend on our attitude to the Arabs, but entirely on the attitude of the Arabs to us and to Zionism.

Now, after this introduction, we may proceed to the subject.

Voluntary Agreement Not Possible.

There can be no voluntary agreement between ourselves and the Palestine Arabs. Not now, nor in the prospective future. I say this with such conviction, not because I want to hurt the moderate Zionists. I do not believe that they will be hurt. Except for those who were born blind, they realised long ago that it is utterly impossible to obtain the voluntary consent of the Palestine Arabs for converting “Palestine” from an Arab country into a country with a Jewish majority.

My readers have a general idea of the history of colonisation in other countries. I suggest that they consider all the precedents with which they are acquainted, and see whether there is one solitary instance of any colonisation being carried on with the consent of the native population. There is no such precedent.

The native populations, civilised or uncivilised, have always stubbornly resisted the colonists, irrespective of whether they were civilised or savage.

And it made no difference whatever whether the colonists behaved decently or not. The companions of Cortez and Pizzaro or (as some people will remind us) our own ancestors under Joshua Ben Nun, behaved like brigands; but the Pilgrim Fathers, the first real pioneers of North America, were people of the highest morality, who did not want to do harm to anyone, least of all to the Red Indians, and they honestly believed that there was room enough in the prairies both for the Paleface and the Redskin. Yet the native population fought with the same ferocity against the good colonists as against the bad.

Every native population, civilised or not, regards its lands as its national home, of which it is the sole master, and it wants to retain that mastery always; it will refuse to admit not only new masters but, even new partners or collaborators.

Arabs Not Fools

This is equally true of the Arabs. Our Peace-mongers are trying to persuade us that the Arabs are either fools, whom we can deceive by masking our real aims, or that they are corrupt and can be bribed to abandon to us their claim to priority in Palestine , in return for cultural and economic advantages. I repudiate this conception of the Palestinian Arabs. Culturally they are five hundred years behind us, they have neither our endurance nor our determination; but they are just as good psychologists as we are, and their minds have been sharpened like ours by centuries of fine-spun logomachy. We may tell them whatever we like about the innocence of our aims, watering them down and sweetening them with honeyed words to make them palatable, but they know what we want, as well as we know what they do not want. They feel at least the same instinctive jealous love of Palestine, as the old Aztecs felt for ancient Mexico, and the Sioux for their rolling Prairies.

To imagine, as our Arabophiles do, that they will voluntarily consent to the realisation of Zionism, in return for the moral and material conveniences which the Jewish colonist brings with him, is a childish notion, which has at bottom a kind of contempt for the Arab people; it means that they despise the Arab race, which they regard as a corrupt mob that can be bought and sold, and are willing to give up their fatherland for a good railway system.

All Natives Resist Colonists

There is no justification for such a belief. It may be that some individual Arabs take bribes. But that does not mean that the Arab people of Palestine as a whole will sell that fervent patriotism that they guard so jealously, and which even the Papuans will never sell. Every native population in the world resists colonists as long as it has the slightest hope of being able to rid itself of the danger of being colonised.

That is what the Arabs in Palestine are doing, and what they will persist in doing as long as there remains a solitary spark of hope that they will be able to prevent the transformation of “Palestine” into the “Land of Israel.”

Arab Comprehension

Some of us have induced ourselves to believe that all the trouble is due to misunderstanding – the Arabs have not understood us, and that is the only reason why they resist us; if we can only make it clear to them how moderate our intentions really are, they will immediately extend to us their hand in friendship.

This belief is utterly unfounded and it has been exploded again and again. I shall recall only one instance of many. A few years ago, when the late Mr. Sokolow was on one of his periodic visits to Palestine, he addressed a meeting on this very question of the “misunderstanding.” He demonstrated lucidly and convincingly that the Arabs are terribly mistaken if they think that we have any desire to deprive them of their possessions or to drive them our of the country, or that we want to oppress them. We do not even ask for a Jewish Government to hold the Mandate of the League of Nations.

One of the Arab papers, ” El Carmel,” replied at the time, in an editorial article, the purport of which was this :

The Zionists are making a fuss about nothing. There is no misunderstanding. All that Mr. Sokolow says about the Zionist intentions is true, but the Arabs know that without him. Of course, the Zionists cannot now be thinking of driving the Arabs out of the country, or oppressing them, not do they contemplate a Jewish Government. Quite obviously, they are now concerned with one thing only- that the Arabs should not hinder their immigration. The Zionists assure us that even immigration will be regulated strictly according to the economic needs of Palestine. The Arabs have never doubted that: it is a truism, for otherwise there can be no immigration.

No “Misunderstanding”

This Arab editor was actually willing to agree that Palestine has a very large potential absorptive capacity, meaning that there is room for a great many Jews in the country without displacing a single Arab. There is only one thing the Zionists want, and it is that one thing that the Arabs do not want, for that is the way by which the Jews would gradually become the majority, and then a Jewish Government would follow automatically, and the future of the Arab minority would depend on the goodwill of the Jews; and a minority status is not a good thing, as the Jews themselves are never tired of pointing out. So there is no “misunderstanding”.

The Zionists want only one thing, Jewish immigration; and this Jewish immigration is what the Arabs do not want.

This statement of the position by the Arab editor is so logical, so obvious, so indisputable, that everyone ought to know it by heart, and it should be made the basis of all our future discussions on the Arab question. It does not matter at all which phraseology we employ in explaining our colonising aims, Herzl’s or Sir Herbert Samuel’s.

Colonisation carries its own explanation, the only possible explanation, unalterable and as clear as daylight to every ordinary Jew and every ordinary Arab.

Colonisation can have only one aim, and Palestine Arabs cannot accept this aim. It lies in the very nature of things, and in this particular regard nature cannot be changed.

The Iron Wall

We cannot offer any adequate compensation to the Palestinian Arabs in return for Palestine. And therefore, there is no likelihood of any voluntary agreement being reached. So that all those who regard such an agreement as a condition sine qua non for Zionism may as well say “non” and withdraw from Zionism.

Zionist colonisation must either stop, or else proceed regardless of the native population. Which means that it can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population – behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach.

That is our Arab policy; not what we should be, but what it actually is, whether we admit it or not. What need, otherwise, of the Balfour Declaration? Or of the Mandate? Their value to us is that outside Power has undertaken to create in the country such conditions of administration and security that if the native population should desire to hinder our work, they will find it impossible.

And we are all of us ,without any exception, demanding day after day that this outside Power, should carry out this task vigorously and with determination.

In this matter there is no difference between our “militarists” and our “vegetarians”. Except that the first prefer that the iron wall should consist of Jewish soldiers, and the others are content that they should be British.

We all demand that there should be an iron wall. Yet we keep spoiling our own case, by talking about “agreement” which means telling the Mandatory Government that the important thing is not the iron wall, but discussions. Empty rhetoric of this kind is dangerous. And that is why it is not only a pleasure but a duty to discredit it and to demonstrate that it is both fantastic and dishonest.

Zionism Moral and Just

Two brief remarks:

In the first place, if anyone objects that this point of view is immoral, I answer: It is not true: either Zionism is moral and just ,or it is immoral and unjust. But that is a question that we should have settled before we became Zionists. Actually we have settled that question, and in the affirmative.

We hold that Zionism is moral and just. And since it is moral and just, justice must be done, no matter whether Joseph or Simon or Ivan or Achmet agree with it or not.

There is no other morality.

Eventual Agreement

In the second place, this does not mean that there cannot be any agreement with the Palestine Arabs. What is impossible is a voluntary agreement. As long as the Arabs feel that there is the least hope of getting rid of us, they will refuse to give up this hope in return for either kind words or for bread and butter, because they are not a rabble, but a living people. And when a living people yields in matters of such a vital character it is only when there is no longer any hope of getting rid of us, because they can make no breach in the iron wall. Not till then will they drop their extremist leaders, whose watchword is “Never!” And the leadership will pass to the moderate groups, who will approach us with a proposal that we should both agree to mutual concessions. Then we may expect them to discuss honestly practical questions, such as a guarantee against Arab displacement, or equal rights for Arab citizen, or Arab national integrity.

And when that happens, I am convinced that we Jews will be found ready to give them satisfactory guarantees, so that both peoples can live together in peace, like good neighbours.

But the only way to obtain such an agreement, is the iron wall, which is to say a strong power in Palestine that is not amenable to any Arab pressure. In other words, the only way to reach an agreement in the future is to abandon all idea of seeking an agreement at present.

From the text at http://www.jabotinsky.org/Jaboworld/docs/Iron%20Wall.doc (with some corrections of typography and grammar – emphasis is in the original).

A similar text is at http://www.marxists.de/middleast/ironwall/ironwall.htm

---

THE ETHICS OF THE IRON WALL

By Vladimir Jabotinsky

The Jewish Standard’, 11.11.1923.

Originally Published in Rassviet (Paris) 11/11/1923 as a continuation of the previous article.

Let us go back to the Helsingfors Programme. Since I am one of those who helped to draft it, I am naturally not disposed to question the justice of the principles advocated there. The programme guarantees citizenship equality, and national self-determination. I am firmly convinced that any impartial judge will accept this programme as the ideal basis for peaceful and neighbourly collaboration between two nations.

But it is absurd to expect the Arabs to have the mentality of an impartial judge; for in this conflict they are not the judges; but one of the contending parties. And after all, our chief question is whether the Arabs, even if they believed in peaceful collaboration they would agree to have any “neighbours”, even good neighbours, in the country which they regard as their own. Not even those who try to move us with high-sounding phrases will dare to deny that national homogeneity is more convenient than natural diversity. So why should a nation that is perfectly content with its isolation admit to its country even good neighbours in any considerable number? I want neither your honey nor your sting”, is a reasonable answer.

But apart from this fundamental difficulty, why must it be the Arabs who should accept the Helsingfors Programme, or, in that matter any programme for a State which has a mixed national population? To make such a demand is to ask for the impossible. The Springer theory is not more than 30 years old. And no nation, not even the most civilised, has yet agreed to apply this theory honestly in practice. Even the Czechs, under the leadership of Masaryk, the teacher of all autonomists, could not would not do it.

Among the Arabs, even their intellectuals have never heard of this theory. But these same intellectuals would know that a minority always suffers everywhere: the Christians in Turkey, the Moslems in India, the Irish under the British, the Poles and Czechs under the Germans, now the Germans under the Poles and Czechs, and so forth, without end. So that one must be intoxicated with rhetoric to expect the Arabs to believe that the Jews, of all the people in the world, will alone prove able, or will, at least, honestly intend to realise an idea that has not succeeded with other nations who are with much greater authority.

If I insist on this point, it is not because I want the Jews, too, to abandon the Helsigfors Programme as the basis of a future modus vivendi. On the contrary we- at least the writer of these lines – believe in this programme as much as we believe in our ability to give effect to it in political life, though all precedents have failed. But it would be useless now to the Arabs. They would not understand, and they would not place any trust in its principles: they would not be able to appreciate them.

II

And since it is useless, it must also be harmful. It is incredible what political simpletons Jews are. They shut their eyes to one of the most elementary rules of life, that you must not “meet halfway” those who do not want to meet you.

There was a typical example in old Russia, when one of the oppressed nations, with one accord, launched a crusade against the Jews, boycotting them and pogroming them. At the same time, this nation was fighting to gain its own autonomy, without any attempt to conceal it means to use its autonomy for the purpose of oppressing the Jews. Worse than before. And yet, Jewish politicians and writers, (even Jewish nationalists) considered it their duty to support the autonomist efforts of their enemy, on the ground that autonomy is a sacred cause. It is remarkable how we Jews regard it as our duty to stand up and cheer whenever the Marsellaise is played, even if it is played by Haman himself, and Jewish heads are smashed to its accompaniment. I was once told of a man who was an ardent Democrat and always whenever he heard the Marsellaise, he stood stiffly attention, like a soldier on parade. One night burglars broke into his house, and one of them played the Marsellaise. This sort of thing is not morality, it is twaddle. Human society is built up on the basis of mutual advantage. If you take away the mutual principle right becomes a falsehood. Each man who passes my window in the street has a right to live only in so far as he recognises my right to live; but if he is determined to kill me, I cannot admit that he has any right to live. And that is true also of nations. Otherwise, the world would become a jungle of wild beasts, where not only the weak, but also those who have any scrap of feeling would be exterminated.

The world must be a place of co-operation and mutual goodwill. If we are to live we should all live in the same way, and if we are to die we should all die in the same way.

But there is no morality, no ethics that concedes the right of a glutton to gorge, while more tempered people die of starvation. There is only one possible morality, that of humanity, and in practice it amounts in our particular instance to this: if besides the Helsingfors Programme we had our pocket full of concessions of every kind, including our willingness to participate in some fantastic Arab Federation od morza do morza (from sea to sea) negotiations with regard to them would still be possible only if the Arabs would first consent to the creation of a Jewish Palestine. Our ancestors knew that very well. And the Talmud quotes a very instructive legal action – which has a direct bearing on this matter. Two people walking along the road find a piece of cloth. One of them says: ” I found it. It is mine:” But the other says: ” No: that is not true: I found the cloth, and it is mine: ” The judge to whom they appeal cuts the cloth in two, and each of these obstinate folk gets half. But there is another version of this action. It is only one of the two claimants who is obstinate: the other, on the contrary, has determined to make the world wonder at this magnanimity. So he says: ” We both found the cloth, and therefore I ask only a half of it, because the second belongs to B. But B. insists that he found it, and that he alone is entitled to it. In this case, the Talmud recommends a wise Judgment, that is, how very disappointing to our magnanimous gentleman. The judge says: ” There is agreement about one half of the cloth. A. admits that it belongs to B. So it is only the second half that is in dispute. We shall, therefore divide this into two halves: And the obstinate claimant gets three-quarters of the cloth, while the ”gentleman” has only one quarter, and serve him right. It is a very fine thing to be a gentleman, but it is no reason for being an idiot. Our ancestors knew that. But we have forgotten it. We should bear it in mind. Particularly, since we are very badly situated in this matter of concessions. There is not much that we can concede to Arab nationalism, without destroying Zionism. We cannot abandon the effort to achieve a Jewish majority in Palestine. Nor can we permit any Arab control of our immigration, or join an Arab Federation. We cannot even support Arab movement, it is at present hostile to us and consequently we all, including even the pro-Arab rhetoriomongers, rejoice at every defeat sustained by this movement, not only adjacent Transjordan, and Syria, but even in Morocco. And this state of affairs will continue, because it cannot be otherwise, until one day the iron wall will compel the Arabs to come to an arrangement with Zionism once and for all.

III

Let us consider for a moment the point of view of those to whom this seems immoral. We shall trace the root of the evil to this – that we are seeking to colonise a country against the wishes of its population, in other words, by force. Everything else that is undesirable grows out of this root with axiomatic inevitability. What then is to be done?

The simplest way out would be to look for a different country to colonise. Like Uganda. But if we look more closely into the matter we shall find that the same evil exists there, too. Uganda also has a native population, which consciously or unconsciously as in every other instance in history, will resist the coming of the colonisers. It is true that these natives happen to be black. But that does not alter the essential fact. If it is immoral to colonise a country against the will of its native population, the same morality must apply equally to the black man as to the white. Of course, the blackman may not be sufficiently advanced to think of sending delegations to London, but he will soon find some kindhearted white friends, who will instruct him. Though should these natives even prove utterly helpless, like children, the matter would only become worse. Then if colonisation is invasion and robbery, the greatest crime of all would be to rob helpless children. Consequently, colonisation in Uganda is also immoral, and colonisation in any other place in the world, whatever it may be called, is immoral. There are no more uninhabited islands in the world. In every oasis there is a native population settled from times immemorial, who will not tolerate an immigrant majority or an invasion of outsiders. So that if there is any landless people in the world, even its dream of a national home must be an immoral dream. . Those who are landless must remain landless to all eternity. The whole earth has been allocated. Basta: Morality has said so:

From the Jewish point of view, morality has a particularly interesting appearance. It is said that we Jews number 15 million people scattered throughout the world. Half of them are now literally homeless, poor, hunted wretches. The number of Arabs totals 38 million. They inhabit Morocco, Algeria, Tunis, Tripoli, Egypt, Syria, Arabia and Iraq – an area that apart from desert equals the size of half Europe. There are in this vast area 16 Arabs to the square mile. It is instructive to recall by way of comparison that Sicily has 352 and England 669 inhabitants to the square mile. It is still more instructive to recall that Palestine constitutes about one two hundredth part of this area.

Yet if homeless Jewry demands Palestine for itself it is “immoral” because it does not suit the native population. Such morality may be accepted among cannibals, but not in a civilised world. The soil does not belong to those who possess land in excess but to those who do not possess any. It is an act of simple justice to alienate part of their land from those nations who are numbered among the great landowners of the world, in order to provide a place of refuge for a homeless, wandering people. And if such a big landowning nation resists which is perfectly natural – it must be made to comply by compulsion. Justice that is enforced does not cease to be justice. This is the only Arab policy that we shall find possible. As for an agreement, we shall have time to discuss that later.

All sorts of catchwords are used against Zionism; people invoke Democracy, majority rule national self-determination. Which means, that the Arabs being at present the majority in Palestine, have the right of self-determination, and may therefore insist that Palestine must remain an Arab country. Democracy and self-determination are sacred principles, but sacred principles like the Name of the Lord must not be used in vain –to bolster up a swindle, to conceal injustice. The principle of self-determination does not mean that if someone has seized a stretch of land it must remain in his possession for all time, and that he who was forcibly ejected from his land must always remain homeless. Self-determination means revision – such a revision of the distribution of the earth among the nations that those nations who have too much should have to give up some of it to those nations who have not enough or who have none, so that all should have some place on which to exercise their right of self-determination. And now when the whole of the civilised world has recognised that Jews have a right to return to Palestine, which means that the Jews are, in principle, also “citizens” and “inhabitants” of Palestine, only they were driven out, and their return must be a lengthy process, it is wrong to contend that meanwhile the local population has the right to refuse to allow them to come back and to that “Democracy”. The Democracy of Palestine consists of two national groups, the local group and these who were driven out, and the second group is the larger.

* A reference to the national-cultural autonomy theory of Otto Bauer and Karl Renner (who used the pseudonym of Rudolf Brenner) advanced at the second International by Austrian Social Democrats and adopted by the Jewish Russian Bund (anti-Zionist socialists).

http://www.jabotinsky.org/Jaboworld/docs/ethics.doc (Journals of original Publication not given)